



Voices & Visions

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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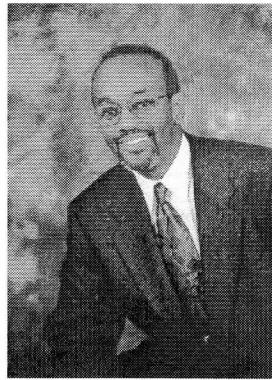
An Invitation to Annual Meeting 2001

"Many Voices, One in Christ"

The Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference will be held **June 22-23, 2001, at Congregational Christian United Church of Christ in Lanett, Ala.** Our time together will be a celebration of the growth and renewal we're experiencing in the Conference—a time to praise God for our diversity of gifts and our unity in Christ.

Many treats are in store for those who attend. We will worship, sing, and participate in workshops, and our youth will have a special program of events. A highlight of the meeting will be the outstanding preaching of **Rev. Nancy Hastings Sehested** and **Rev. Dr. Ozzie E. Smith, Jr.**

Rev. Sehested has been called "the best-known female Southern Baptist in the world" and "one of the best preachers in the country." She was ordained in 1981 at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga. For eight years, she served as senior pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.—a church that was "disfellowshipped" (excommunicated) from the county's Baptist Association for calling a woman pastor. Rev. Sehested has been featured in several television documentaries, including Bill Moyers' special series on religion. She has preached, taught, and led retreats throughout the U.S. and in many other parts of the world. Married and the mother of two daughters, she has served as Board president of the Alliance of Baptists and is currently a chaplain at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution in Spruce Pine, N.C.



Rev. Smith is a pastor, music scholar, and teacher. A talented percussionist, bass guitarist, and saxophonist, his repertoire includes big band, jazz, and R&B, and his traveling credits include The Temptations, Joan Rivers, and The Dells. Ordained in 1994, he served as associate pastor and staff musician at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, as well as adjunct faculty in preaching at McCormick Theological Seminary. In 1996, he accepted God's call to organize and pastor Covenant United Church of Christ in South Holland, Ill.—where his rich musical experience embodies his preaching, offering a fresh approach to ministry and inspiration to all who attend. He is married and the father of three children.

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**Please mark your calendar and plan to attend
a rich and rewarding Annual Meeting!**

*"I will pour out my Spirit upon all ... and your young shall see visions
and your old shall dream dreams." —Acts 2:17*



“Grace to you, and peace ...”

A Letter from the Conference Minister

Dear Friends,

I've had the privilege of serving on the Alliance of Baptists–United Church of Christ Dialogue Team. We've been exploring how we can collaborate with these sisters and brothers in Christ, what values and affirmations we share, and how our life together as two distinctive traditions can bring a fuller and more vibrant witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Alliance of Baptists is a progressive movement that was founded in 1987, born amid the heated controversy of the fundamentalist uprising within the Southern Baptist Convention. At the upcoming UCC General Synod XXIII, we will consider the following resolution: “The United Church of Christ expresses its profound gratitude to God and to the Alliance of Baptists for the promise of a rich relationship, to the end that together we may continue to seek the realization of Jesus’ prayer ‘that they may all be one.’”

With an Alliance colleague, I drafted “A Statement on Convergence in Matters of Theology and Practice between the Alliance of Baptists and the United Church of Christ.” Baptists speak about the freedoms of the individual believer and the local congregation within the context of an “associational principal.” We in the United Church of Christ speak about autonomy or liberty of the local church within the context of a covenant. In both traditions, freedom of the individual believer and the local church is affirmed fully and with great joy, but it is a freedom always exercised within the context of a responsibility to a greater community in the name of Jesus Christ.

Other convergences are intriguing as well. We anticipated that baptism would be a stumbling block in our conversations; however, we affirmed many common understandings around its meaning. In the United Church of Christ, we affirm that “the water, words, and action of the sacrament are visible signs that convey the Christian’s burial and resurrection with Jesus Christ.” Baptists—according to a church statement in response to ecumenical conversations about baptism—seek to “avoid any suggestion that rites in themselves convey grace, while at the same time affirming that they may be occasions of a means of grace.” Both the

Alliance of Baptists and the UCC affirm that the waters of baptism bind Christians together and impel us to make real and visible our unity in Christ.

The two traditions’ understandings of initiation into the Christian faith bear a subtle but important symmetry. While in the UCC most congregations practice infant baptism, some of our churches of the Christian tradition practice adult baptism. Among Baptists it is more prevalent these days to dedicate an infant as a mark of their entry into the community of faith, and then baptize a person upon profession of faith at about the same age that a child would be confirmed in the UCC. Each tradition has established rituals for an infant’s reception into the community of faith and for a young adult’s public affirmation of the fullness of God’s grace.

Another point of convergence is that both the United Church of Christ and the Alliance of Baptists affirm, in a Reformation spirit, “the priesthood of all believers.” At the same time we affirm the need for a professional ministry for which people are ordained and set apart to preach and teach, to be bearers and interpreters of our traditions. In both traditions, ordination takes place in the context of other relationships, although those relationships and their connections are exercised differently.

Perhaps the most powerful point of convergence is the understanding that God’s redemptive activity through Jesus Christ is exercised in its fullness not simply by the salvation of individual souls. It is exercised, according to our joint statement, by “the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and the calling of God to all people to repentance and faith, reconciliation and hope, social and economic justice.” We share the belief that God’s salvation includes justice for all people, protection for this earth and the faithful stewardship of its resources.

As we look forward to the Annual Meeting of our Conference, we will be celebrating this relationship. One of our keynote speakers, Rev. Nancy Hastings Sehested, is a pastor very active in the life of the Alliance of Baptists. These conversations remind me of the words of the 133rd Psalm: “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!”

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs



We hold in prayer:

- † **First United Church of Christ, Belvedere, Tenn.**, which was struck by lightning and incurred severe damage
- † **Rev. Milton Hurst** and **Vanessa Robbs**, who have suffered the death of their fathers
- † **Rev. Frank McCook**, **Rev. Hal Schoup**, and the **mother of Rev. Bennie Liggins**, who are recuperating from surgery
- † **Rev. Julius Jefferson**, who suffered the death of his sister-in-law, and who is providing support to families of the victims of the recent National Guard airplane crash in Georgia
- † The **father of Rev. Joyce Hollyday**, who was hospitalized again

Please let "Voices & Visions" know of your concerns and celebrations. Contact Joyce Hollyday: 800-442-1064; jhollyday@citcom.net.

Available from the Conference Office

- A videotape, made by a member of the German EKU delegation, about their visit with us
- A tri-fold on the restructuring of the United Church of Christ

Contact Gerri Ryons-Hudson (800-807-1993) for more information.

We celebrate:

- * **Pastor Dennis Lott** and the congregation of **Mountain Grove Congregational Christian UCC in Hanceville, Ala.**, who have taken in 30 new members in two months and give thanks for renewal of their ministries and their connection to the UCC
- * **Revs. Lesley Brogan** and **Ginnie Ferrell**, who were installed as associate pastors at **Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta** on February 25
- * **Rev. Roger Lovette**, new interim pastor at **United Church in Huntsville, Ala.**
- * **St. John's Church in Cullman, Ala.**, for its medical mission in Belize
- * **Rev. Andrew Young**, on the occasion of having the former International Boulevard in Atlanta renamed after him on March 12, his 69th birthday
- * **LaToya Moore** and **Rev. Budd Friend-Jones**, for having articles published in the *United Church News*
- * The **Allen Retreat Center**, which is being used for a Women's Spring Rally and an EAL/WGA Association Easter Egg Hunt
- * A new UCC polity course, led by **Rev. Tim Downs**, with more than 25 members

Voices & Visions

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Voices & Visions is the bimonthly newsletter of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

At its meeting January 12-13 in Lanett, Ala., the Board of Directors took the following actions:

- Welcomed **Lorin Cope**, from the Office of the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, the staff person charged with Conference relations; and **Myrtle Johnson**, the new chair of the Christian Education Commission
- Recommended that the Southeast Conference contribute \$23,000 to the national United Church of Christ for **OCWM**, in our continuing effort to raise our contributions
- Heard a report from **Rodney Franklin**, who has served on the UCC Board of Directors of Wider Church Ministries, and congratulated the Southeast Conference for having the highest per capita giving in the UCC to One Great Hour of Sharing
- Heard staff reports from **Joyce Hollyday** on the Rekindle the Gift program, which is now actively visiting our historically AMA congregations, and **Dick Sales** on the TAP program, and welcomed **Kathy Clark** as TAP's new Program Administrator
- Acknowledged that **Will Rabert**, the Coordinator of DART (Disaster Assistance Relief Team), is beginning to set up a network with representatives in each congregation in the Conference, so that we can respond more quickly and efficiently to natural disasters
- Hired **Angie Wright** as a grant writer for the Conference
- Signed up **Board members** to deliver thank-you certificates to our congregations for OCWM contributions
- Celebrated the first worship service of **Community Congregational UCC in LaGrange, Ga.**, which took place on January 7, 2001
- Received **Tim Downs'** report on two Alliance of Baptists congregations that are considering joining the United Church of Christ
- Expressed great excitement about the **renewal of our established congregations and growth of new church starts** in the Southeast Conference. We are moving from maintenance to mission and renewal. Praise God!

“Unsticking” Churches

February 8-10, at Pilgrim House in Chattanooga, Tenn., 16 folks from 11 congregations gathered for a **Covenant for Renewal Conference** with Rev. Mike Simpson of the Lazarus Project. We explored the topic, How do we keep churches from getting stuck, and when they are stuck, how do we unstick them?

Rev. Simpson's understanding is that it is not unusual for churches to get stuck. We are like families, and the very things that get families stuck get churches stuck. Sometimes it's persons, and sometimes it's history, that sticks us. But we need not stay stuck. A leader, lay or clergy, can understand what is happening in a church and be the catalyst to help it move forward.

Those who participated in the conference will be meeting again in mutual support of their ministries on **Friday, June 22**, from 12 noon until 5:00 P.M., prior to the Annual Meeting of the Conference, under the leadership of Revs. Jim Norris and Tom Baird. All who are interested in the renewal of congregations are invited to come.

ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Thursday, June 21

6:00 PM to 9:00 PM 2nd Annual TAP Convocation

Friday, June 22

9:00 AM	to	4:00 PM	TAP Convocation (continued)
9:00 AM	to	3:00 PM	New Church Start Pastors Seminar
12 Noon	to	5:00 PM	Covenant for Renewal Meeting
3:00 PM	to	5:00 PM	Board of Directors Meeting
5:00 PM	to	10:00 PM	Registration
6:00 PM	to	7:00 PM	Dinner
7:00 PM	to	7:30 PM	Hearings
7:45 PM	to	9:00 PM	Opening Worship & Celebration
9:00 PM			Ice Cream Social

Saturday, June 23

8:30 AM	to	9:00 AM	Continental Breakfast
9:00 AM	to	9:30 AM	Opening Worship & Music
9:30 AM	to	12:30 PM	Business Session Opens
12:30 PM	to	1:30 PM	Lunch
1:30 PM	to	2:30 PM	Business Session Resumes
3:00 PM	to	5:00 PM	Workshops
5:30 PM	to	6:30 PM	Dinner
7:00 PM	to	7:30 PM	Recognitions & Service of Remembrance
7:45 PM	to	9:15 PM	Worship

Sunday, June 24

8:30 AM	to	9:30 AM	Board of Directors Meeting
11:00 AM (ET)			Worship - Congregational Christian UCC, Lanett
11:00 AM (CT)			Worship - Pleasant Grove Congregational Christian UCC, LaFayette
			Worship - New Hope Congregational Christian UCC, Roanoke
			Worship - North Main Congregational Christian UCC, Roanoke

Hearings & Resolutions

The procedures for resolutions have been mailed to all congregations. Hearings on resolutions will be held on **Friday, June 22 at 7:00 P.M.**

IMPORTANT ANNUAL MEETING NOTES

An Annual Meeting packet will be mailed to all local church pastors/moderators. It will include a letter of call, registration forms, lodging information, display table reservation forms, and consent forms for the youth program. Please contact your pastor or the Southeast Conference Office (1-800-807-1993; e-mail ghudson@secucc.org) for any additional information or forms that you may need.

Registering for Display Space & Workshop Opportunities

While the facilities at Congregational Christian Church are substantial—and we have no doubt are sufficient for our needs—display space and rooms available for workshops will be limited. If there is a particular issue of social justice around which you wish to do some education, and you would like space in the display area and/or during the workshop time, please remember that registration for those spaces will be on a first come, first served basis.

Ordination Anniversaries & OCWM Recognitions

All clergy celebrating ordination anniversaries will be honored on **Saturday, June 23**. If this is your 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, 50th, etc. anniversary year, please join us so that we can acknowledge you and the work you have done in ministry.

Special congregations will also be recognized for their **OCWM giving**.

Remember the Memorial Service

Over the years, one of the special moments of the Annual Meeting is a time when congregations come forward to read the names of those of their members who have died in the previous year. We encourage all of you to come prepared to participate in that memorial service, which will take place on **Saturday evening, June 23**, after dinner. Each congregation should have a designated representative to read the names of its saints who have passed on.

New Church Start Pastors Seminar

On **Friday, June 22**, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., new church start pastors will gather for a seminar and a time of reflection and sharing. For additional information, contact Bennie Liggins (334) 265-4411.

Theology Among the People Convocation

The 2nd Annual TAP Convocation will begin **Thursday, June 21**, at 6:00 p.m. and continue through **Friday, June 22**, at 4:00 p.m. If you have any questions, contact Kathy Clark (404) 251-9660 or Dick Sales (205) 591-8908.

Inviting All Youth!

Special youth activities at the Annual Meeting will include workshops, recreation, and a youth choir! Check out the next newsletter for more details.

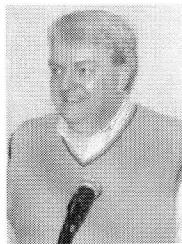
Annual Meeting Workshops

*Workshops will be held on Saturday afternoon, June 23, from 3:00 to 5:00.
Those that are confirmed to date include:*

An Overview of Wider Church Ministries, Rodney Franklin
DART (Disaster Assistance Relief Team) - How We Do Disaster Relief in the SEC, Will Rabert
Restructure of the UCC - Its Impact on Our Ministries, Lorin Cope
Covenant for Renewal, John Mingus
An Overview of the TAP (Theology Among the People) Program,
Dick Sales and Kathy Clark
Evangelism and New Church Development - How Do We Start New Churches?, Bennie Liggins
Rekindle the Gift, Joyce Hollyday and Susan Mitchell
The Alliance of Baptists-UCC Dialogue - Where Have We Been? Where Are We Going?,
Tim Shirley
Parish Nursing - An Opportunity for Pastoral Care, Susan Rice and Doris Heaman
Stewardship - A Year-round Perspective, Kate Huey and Mark Suriano
A New Perspective on Grant Writing, Angie Wright
Advocating for Justice, Marvin Silver

Our National Staff

Several members of the national staff of the United Church of Christ will be joining us for our Annual Meeting.



Lorin W. Cope is Assistant to the President for Conference Relations. Lorin travels widely around the U.S., visiting Conferences and acting as a liaison between them and John H. Thomas, General Minister and President of the UCC. Lorin has been closely involved in the restructuring of the UCC and will lead a workshop for us on that topic.



Kathryn ('Kate') Matthews Huey is Minister for Public Life with the Stewardship and Church Finances Ministry of Local Church Ministries. She was ordained in 1998 and was a teacher of theology and ethics for several years before that. She will lead a workshop on stewardship with Mark Suriano.



Mark J. Suriano is Minister for Congregational Planning with the Stewardship and Church Finances Ministry Team. He served in parish ministry in the Cleveland area for seven years and is now working to develop lay leadership for stewardship education and mission promotion. The author of several resources on stewardship, he is currently at work on a new resource titled *Becoming Stewards*.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Following is a list of hotels to be used during the Annual Meeting. Please note per room rates, requirements, and cut-off dates as applicable. When making reservations, indicate that you are with the Southeast Conference-UCC.

Holiday Inn Express - Exit 77 off I-85 - (334-756-2000) - 15 mins. from Lanett Congregational Christian - Wheelchair- accessible available - Pool - No Pets - 2 doubles or 1 king - \$61.95 (with 30 rooms or less) \$57.75 (with more than 30 rooms) - Ask for "Great Rate"

Econo Lodge - Exit 79 off I-85 - (334-768-3500) - 10 mins. from LCC - Wheelchair-accessible available - No Pets - 2 beds-\$51.79 or 1 bed - \$46.39 - will block off 25 rooms

Days Inn - Exit 79 off I-85 - (334-644-8888) - 5 mins. from LCC - Wheelchair-accessible available - Pool - Pets \$10 extra - 2 doubles-\$48.95 or 1 king-\$47.47

Hampton Inn - Exit 14 off I-85, LaGrange - (706-845-1115) - 25 mins. from LCC - Wheelchair-accessible available - Pool - No Pets - 2 doubles-\$66.60 or 1 king-\$72.50 (rates require 20 or more rooms)

ANNUAL MEETING REGISTRATION INFORMATION

**All registrations postmarked after June 1, 2001
will be charged an additional \$10.**

The registration fee covers all programming, materials, workshops, and meals. Scholarships are available for those who are eligible. Call the Conference office for details.

**\$65 for Adults \$55 for Youth (12-18 yrs.) \$30 for children (3 -11 yrs.)
\$50 for Saturday only \$35 for Friday only**

**Please print clearly
One form per person (copy as needed)**

Name: _____

Phone: _____ **day** _____ **evening** _____

Address: _____

Church (city & name): _____

Attendee Type: Check one _____ **Adult** _____ **Youth** _____ **Child**

Check one _____ **Full Meeting** _____ **Friday only** _____ **Saturday only**

Category Type: Check one _____ **Delegate** _____ **Clergy** _____ **Visitor** _____ **Board Member**

Checks should be made payable to: Southeast Conference (indicate Annual Meeting). Mail registration & checks to: Southeast Conference, UCC, 756 West Peachtree Street, NW, Atlanta, GA 30308 NO LATER THAN JUNE 1.

Overcoming Violence

By Gilbert R. Friend-Jones

Tegel Airport, Berlin. I felt uneasy as I approached the gate. "Tegel?" I wondered. "Why is this name so chilling?" Then I remembered Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Berlin was his hometown.

Bonhoeffer was a German pastor, theologian, ecumenical pioneer, musician, poet, professor, and prophet. Caught in the maelstrom of Hitler's violent Reich, he became a modern martyr. From its inception, he had vehemently opposed the emerging Nazi regime. Tegel was the name of the prison where he was jailed before his execution.

Now I was here. I once had walked through Katym, one of many defenseless villages in Byelorussia that had been overrun and destroyed by Nazis in the most hideous way. I had wept at Babi Yar, where thousands of human beings had been exterminated according to an efficient and monstrous plan. I had brooded over the mass graves of Piskariovskoye cemetery in Saint Petersburg. It contained the remains of hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children who died during the 900-day siege by the Nazi army.

My own father had been lifted out of his West Virginia hometown and plunked inside the nose gunner's turret of a B-24, to drop lethal explosives one Christmas morning on quaint Austrian towns below him. What kind of demonic power had pushed so violently against our world? Even now, I felt nervous as I collected my bags.

More than 1,000 people from all over the world converged on the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis-Kirche (Memorial Church) in central Berlin on February 4, 2001. Snow fell on vener-



able Orthodox bishops from Albania and colorfully dressed women from Ghana. On young Germans sporting tattoos and body piercings, and young Indians wearing delicate saris. On sober Swedish pastors and Indonesian civil servants. I was not alone. It was, by coincidence, the 95th anniversary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's birth.

The emaciated shell of the ruined church stood before us, a stark testament to the true legacy of war. Behind it rose the new church, hopeful in its reality of steel, concrete, and glass. We entered. African drums beat solemnly as a mournful roll call was read: Mahanaem Benjamin, seven months old. Mo'ath Ahmad Abu, 12 years old. Ngg Chiau-byeng, three years old. Each name was a child; each child had died a violent death. They died when their nations went to war. They died when their parents got angry. They died at the hands of other children. They died by their own hand. Together these names called forth an unseen multitude of innocent victims to bear witness against the violence in our world.

The world's media also were there. Television cameras focused first on this gospel choir, then on that stately liturgist, and finally on the congregation singing and praying in every conceivable tongue. We were launching the international "Decade to Overcome Violence—Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace," an initiative of the World Council of Churches. The Council hopes to create a global network of local initiatives aimed at reducing or eliminating all kinds of violence from the earth.

My congregation can be involved in this, and yours can too. The Council is summoning every Christian on earth to be a peacemaker, and every congregation to address the causes and consequences of violence. It does not underestimate the complexities we face. It recognizes that courage, discernment, and faith will be required. But in the name of the countless victims of countless violent acts, it is calling us all to enlist in the "Decade to Overcome Violence."

In the severe cold of a north German winter evening, we carried lighted candles to the Brandenburg Gate. We sang the songs of many nations. Too soon we began our separate journeys home—to Nimes, to Dallas, to Buenos Aires. We had been changed by our experience together. The ghosts of this city's past no longer intimidated us, nor the violence present everywhere in our world today. Although the challenge is sobering, we accept it. We are energized by our solidarity. Linked with one another on every continent of the earth, we know that "we are marching in the light of the Lord."

The **Decade to Overcome Violence** will be the principal subject of a retreat-like gathering of the North American Conference of the World Council of Churches, in **Nashville, Tenn., April 23-24, 2001**. The theme of the retreat, which is open to the public, is "An Instrument of Thy Peace." For more information, contact Philip Jenks at 212-870-3193; e-mail: pej@wcc-coe.org

For more information on the Decade to Overcome Violence, write to: Overcoming Violence, WCC Public Information Team, P. O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland; website: www.wcc-coe.org; e-mail (Diana Mavunduse): dma@wcc-coe.org

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

APRIL

12 **MAUNDY THURSDAY**
13 **GOOD FRIDAY** (Conference Office Closed)
15 **EASTER SUNDAY**
20 - 22 **15th ANNUAL CONVOCATION - ALLIANCE OF BAPTISTS** (Oakhurst Baptist, Atlanta, GA)
20 - 22 **UCC OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF MEETING** (Syracuse, NY)
23 - 25 **GRAHAM CLUSTER MEETING** (Epworth By The Sea, St. Simons Island, GA)
27 - 29 **START SOMETHING - YOUTH FEST** (Camp Lee, Anniston, AL)

MAY

2 **NOMINATING COMMITTEE MEETING** (Conference Call)
4 - 6 **REKINDLE THE GIFT VISIT** (Montgomery, AL)
13 **MOTHER'S DAY**
19 **GENERAL SYNOD ORIENTATION** (Congregational Christian, Lanett, AL)
28 **MEMORIAL DAY** (Conference Office Closed)

Tell the World

In Mission: The **Calendar of Prayer** contains a world of information about the ministries and missions of local churches, Conferences, and our denomination. Pages of prayer for specific ministries for each day of the week can be copied and used for bulletin inserts—a great way your congregation can get to know what is going on in the United Church of Christ next door and around the world. Copies of the 2001/2002 calendar will be distributed at the Annual Meeting of the Conference. Additional copies may be obtained by calling United Church Resources, 1-800-325-7061.

If you would like to share a special ministry of your church—to be read about and made the subject of prayer by people in our larger church family — please consider submitting an article for inclusion in the **Calendar of Prayer**. Consult the calendar for length and types of information included. Submissions should be sent to Pray Associates, P.O. Box 1236, Big Timber, Montana 59011, **by July 2001** for inclusion in the 2002/2003 calendar.

We have some terrific ministries taking place in the churches of our Conference.
Let's not keep them a secret!

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Start Something! *A UCC High School Youth Fest*

Start Something is a high school “youth fest” being held at **Camp Lee, Anniston, Ala., April 27-29, 2001**. Professional music, drama, technology, and theology leaders from all over the U.S. will lead youth in an exciting exploration of God’s call to each of us to use our gifts in many different ways.

Every congregation in the Southeast Conference will receive a packet of material, including registration forms and an introductory video. The cost of the weekend is \$75. Space is limited, so please make sure that the youth see this mailing as soon as it arrives.

Start Something is a project of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, funded by a grant from the Lily Endowment. For more information, visit www.startsomething.org., or call toll-free 877-627-5654.

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday



I understand now why the apostle Paul wrote so many letters. He had a rare opportunity to visit many churches, and he had a deep affection for them. He wanted to celebrate their growth and successes, and support them in their struggles. And he couldn't keep from writing about it all.

Rev. Susan Mitchell and I have had the delightful privilege of traveling throughout the Southeast Conference, visiting our congregations founded by the American Missionary Association (AMA), as part of the Rekindle the Gift program. Like Paul, I have to share my enthusiasm.

Susan and I made our first visit in January, to **Rush Memorial Congregational UCC in Atlanta**. We knew right away that we were off to a good start. After Sunday service, several older members stayed in the sanctuary to share their stories. Younger members sat across the aisle and listened, taking note of the rich history that is their legacy.

The stories from the Civil Rights era were particularly powerful. Women from the church told of desegregating a downtown shoe store, tying up the seats until the store finally relented. During the Vietnam War, a "tent city" grew up in the church's yard when Rush offered asylum to students who had been expelled from Morehouse College for being conscientious objectors.

February took us to **Charleston, S.C.** We began our weekend on Friday with a visit to the **Avery Research Center**, which has extensive archives of the AMA. On Saturday we sat with members of **Plymouth Congregational UCC**—several at the church, one recuperating from surgery at home, and with the oldest member in a hospital. We heard more inspiring stories, about desegregation efforts and voter registration drives. Virtually everyone talked about the ways members of the church have cared for one another, and what a wonderful family Plymouth Church is.

In March, new friends at **King's Chapel in Alipine, Ala.**, explained that their church was named for one of its earliest members, King Solomon Calhoun, a former slave of U.S. Vice President John C. Calhoun. His great-grandson told us about an old book, a handwritten history of the church, which had been discovered in an out-house. Members talked about how the church helped them to survive a world that included the Ku Klux Klan, segregation, persistent humiliation from whites, and lynchings.

*We in the UCC are all
indebted to our
sisters and brothers
in our AMA congregations.*

Down the road in **Talladega**, members of **First Congregational UCC** spoke proudly of the fact that, in a time when churches were being bombed, theirs was the only one in the area that was willing to hold Movement meetings. They also spoke with great pride about their connection to the American Missionary Association, the UCC, and **Talladega College**, which was founded by the AMA. Rev. Milton Hurst gave Susan and me a tour of the campus, which included viewing the famous murals of the *Amistad* event.

After these visits, I can only echo Paul's words in his letter to the Romans: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you." We in the UCC are all indebted to our sisters and brothers in our AMA congregations, for courage in difficult times and persistent faithfulness through many generations.

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body.

While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them,

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

—Luke 24:1-5



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